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AUTHOR Mullen, T. Patrick; Channess, Robert L.
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ABSTRACT

A three-year study was conducted at a California junior college to determine the number of college freshmen who needed assistance/counseling in reading achievement. In the first phase of the study (1974-1975), all entering freshmen were administered the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, Form C. The same instrument was used during the second phase of the study (1976/1977), but only for a random sample of 50% of the freshmen class. The total reading scores during the three year period ranked 7 to 8% of the freshmen at the elementary level of reading ability to 11% at junior high level, and 20 to 21% in the lower high school range (below grade 11.6). Other findings are that more individuals scored lower in comprehension than in vocabulary, that significantly more males scored lower than females, and that significantly more Spanish-surnamed students demonstrated the need for reading skills development. (RL)

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TREND IN THE READING STATUS OF A COMMUNITY COLLEGE FRESHMAN CLASS:
GREATER NUMBERS IN LOWEST QUARTILE AND DECLINING COMPREHENSION SCORES

T. Patrick Mullen
California State University San Bernardino

Robert L. Chamness
Cypress College

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Much recent publicity has been given to the fact that a number of young people graduate from high school without mastering adequate reading skills. Some of these students enter junior college. Since the aim of a good educational program is to provide instruction at the level of the learner and systematically improve the functional level of the learner, it is necessary to provide some reading instruction at the college level. The purpose of this study was to ascertain the number of college freshmen at a typical junior college whose demonstrated reading achievement was in need of assistance. On the basis of this information an appropriate number of sections of reading improvement courses and tutorial programs could be scheduled, and students needing assistance could be counseled and enrolled.

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Procedures

The study was conducted at Cypress College, Cypress, California for the school years 1974/1975 and 1976/1977. Serving a greater Los Angeles suburban population of 550,000, Cypress College is a part of the North Orange County Community College District. In general terms the 1970 census figures indicate that the area has relative affluence, low unemployment, small minority population (12.2 %) and high educational levels. (Dalton 1975) In the first phase of the study all entering freshmen were administered the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, Form C. The same instrument was used in the second phase of the study, but a random sample of fifty percent of the freshmen class was used. The first phase of the study concentrated on establishing a demonstrated need for reading improvement classes at various levels: reading scores at elementary level, reading scores at junior high level, and reading scores in lower high school range. Also an analysis of the vocabulary and comprehension scores was studied as a possibly influence the content of the various reading improvement classes and influence the counseling of students into appropriate sections. The second phase of the study focused on the trend in enrollment at the college as a potential guide for projecting scheduling of reading improvement classes and tutorial programs. Phase one also included two analyses not considered in phase two: the minority population of the college, Chicano students were identified by Spanish surname and compared to the remaining population of the study. Also a comparison was made

of reading scores of male and female students.

Through a survey of numerous comparative studies measuring growth in reading skills Truinman, Rowls and Faar (1976) have concluded that the gradual improvement in reading competency over the four decades prior to 1965 may have lessened or halted; and finally over the last ten years there may have been a decline in reading achievement. While this survey included many levels, the majority were within elementary range. At the junior college level Roueche and Hurlburt (1960) indicate a growing concern for low scores on reading achievement tests since the 1950's. They suggest that reason for these low scores may be an "open-door" admission policy. While a number have expressed similar opinions (Menkoff, 1974; Olsen and Swiss, 1976; and Walter, 1976), surveys by Farrell (1975) indicate that the factor of admitting "non-traditional" students who are poor readers and dislike reading must be considered along with other factors including the fact that community college professors often select texts without consideration of readability of the texts. Harneschfeger and Willy (1976) found that scores on S.A.T. and A.C.T. have demonstrated a recent downward trend among high school juniors and seniors.

Evans and DuBois (1972) call attention to a lack of empirical research on reading at the junior/community college level and indicate that the four most common reading instruments used in research at college level were (1) Nelson-Denny Reading Test, (2) Iowa Silent Reading Test, (3) California Reading Test, and (4) Cooperative Reading Test.

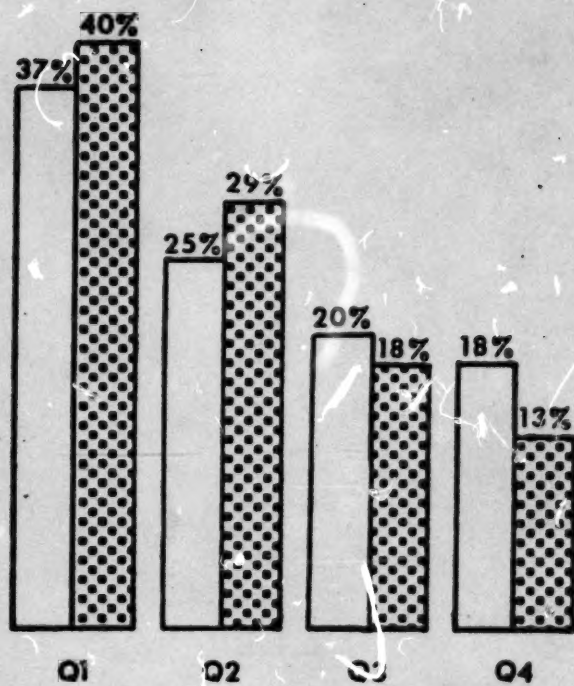
The most commonly used test, the Nelson-Denny, has been the subject of several studies and analyses by Goolsby (1973, 1976) from which one may conclude that the test is more appropriate for the early part of college (a junior college) than for more advanced level. He also reports correlations between vocabulary and comprehension at .82 and .80.

Studies indicate that numerous reading programs are successful in improving various aspects of the learning to read and reading to learn processes in community colleges; however, few address themselves to size of classes and none indicate needs for numbers of sections of classes of 20 students, and a survey by Schnell (1974) indicated that 63 % of the college reading teachers who responded taught 100 or fewer students per semester, 29 % taught 101 to 250, and 8 % had over 250 students per semester. Taking the majority figure, if a reading teacher were assigned four groups, each group would be 25 or fewer students.

Findings

In phase one of the study it was found that on the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, Form C, the total reading score of 50.4 % of the 2,605 students tested were reading below college level. Of those students who scored below college level, 173, or 7 % of the total population, scored elementary level; 221, or 8 % of the total, were at junior high level; while 20 % of the total population, or 546 students, scored in a high school range below 11.6.

Comparatively (see tables 1 and 2), in 1976/77 (phase 2) a total



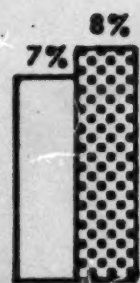
**% of College Freshmen Reading Scores on
Nelson - Denney Reading Test form C
Distribution by Quartiles**



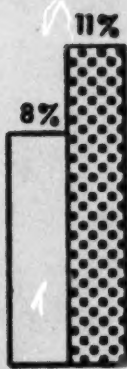
1974-5



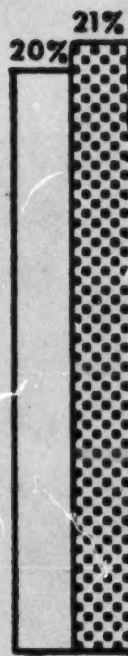
1976-7



Elementary

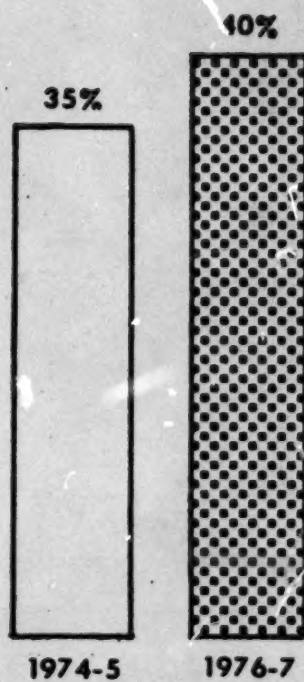


Jr. High



High School
below 11.6

Break down of % of Jr. College Freshmen Reading Below 11.6
Measured by Nelson-Denney Reading Test Form C



% of Jr. College Freshmen Reading Below 11.6
Measured by Nelson-Denney Reading Test Form C B2 A

of 40 % of the sample of 1,619 freshmen scored below 11.6. Of these, 8 % of the total scored at elementary level, 11 % of the total scored at junior high level, while 21 % of the total scored in high school range below 11.6.

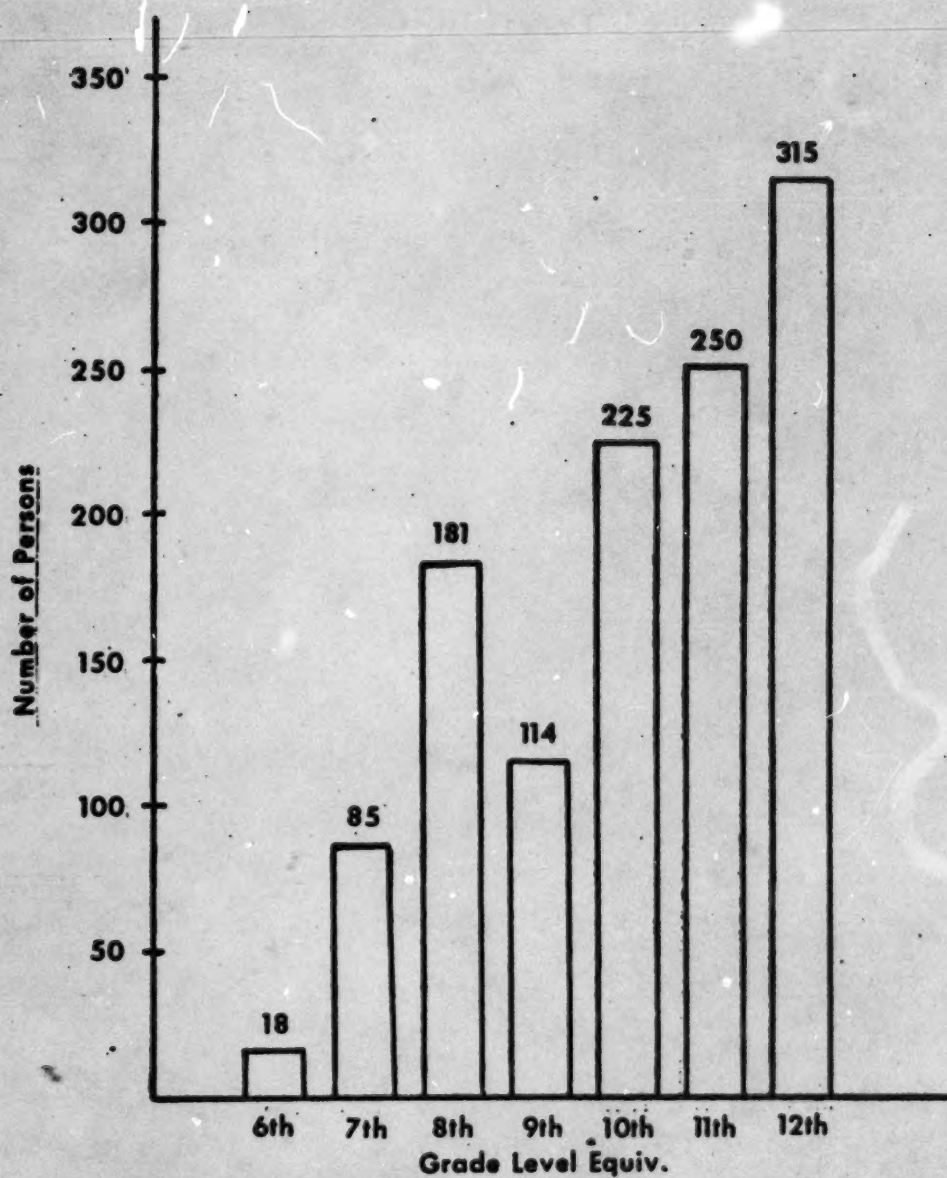
Over the three year period studied it appears that 7 to 8 % of the freshmen score in elementary range, 8 to 11 % at junior high level, and 20 to 21 % in lower high school range. A comparison of these scores is illustrated in table 3.

A Pearson correlation coefficient between the vocabulary scores and comprehension scores on the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, Form C, was computed at .6151 for the 2,685 students in phase 1 of the study.

Fewer individuals earned low range scores in vocabulary than comprehension. At the elementary level in vocabulary there were 18 individuals while at the same level there were 172 comprehension scores. Similarly at the junior high level there were 380 vocabulary and 543 comprehension. Vocabulary scores below 11.4 encompassed 395 individuals while comprehension below 11.5 netted 497. (See tables 4 and 5.)

The number of individuals in phase 1 who scored below 11.6 was 945. At elementary there were 173, junior high 221 and senior high 546. (See table 6.)

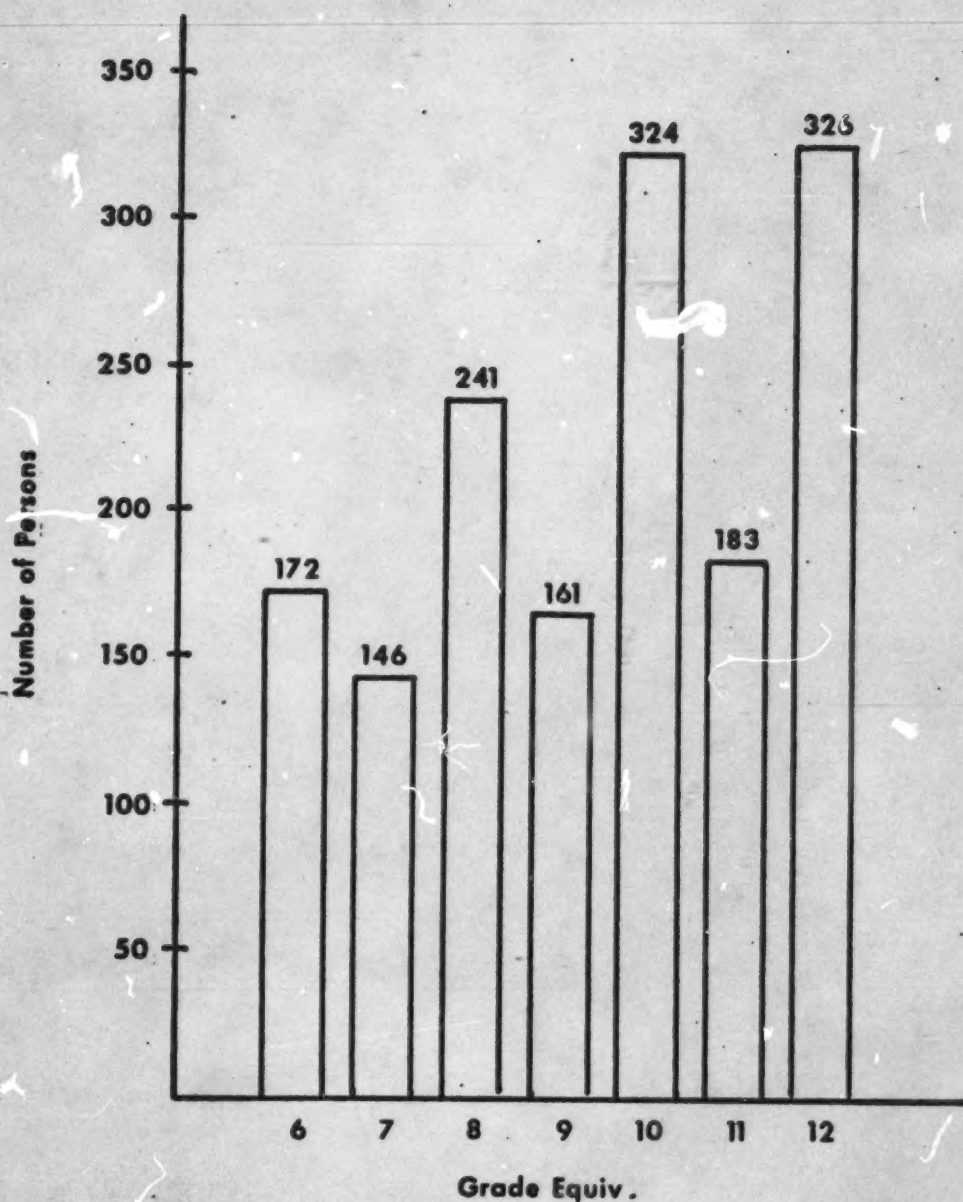
An analysis of variance established a significant difference between males and females, favoring the females. Women composed 47 % of the population while men netted 53 %. The significant difference was noted for total reading score (.015), vocabulary score (.020), and



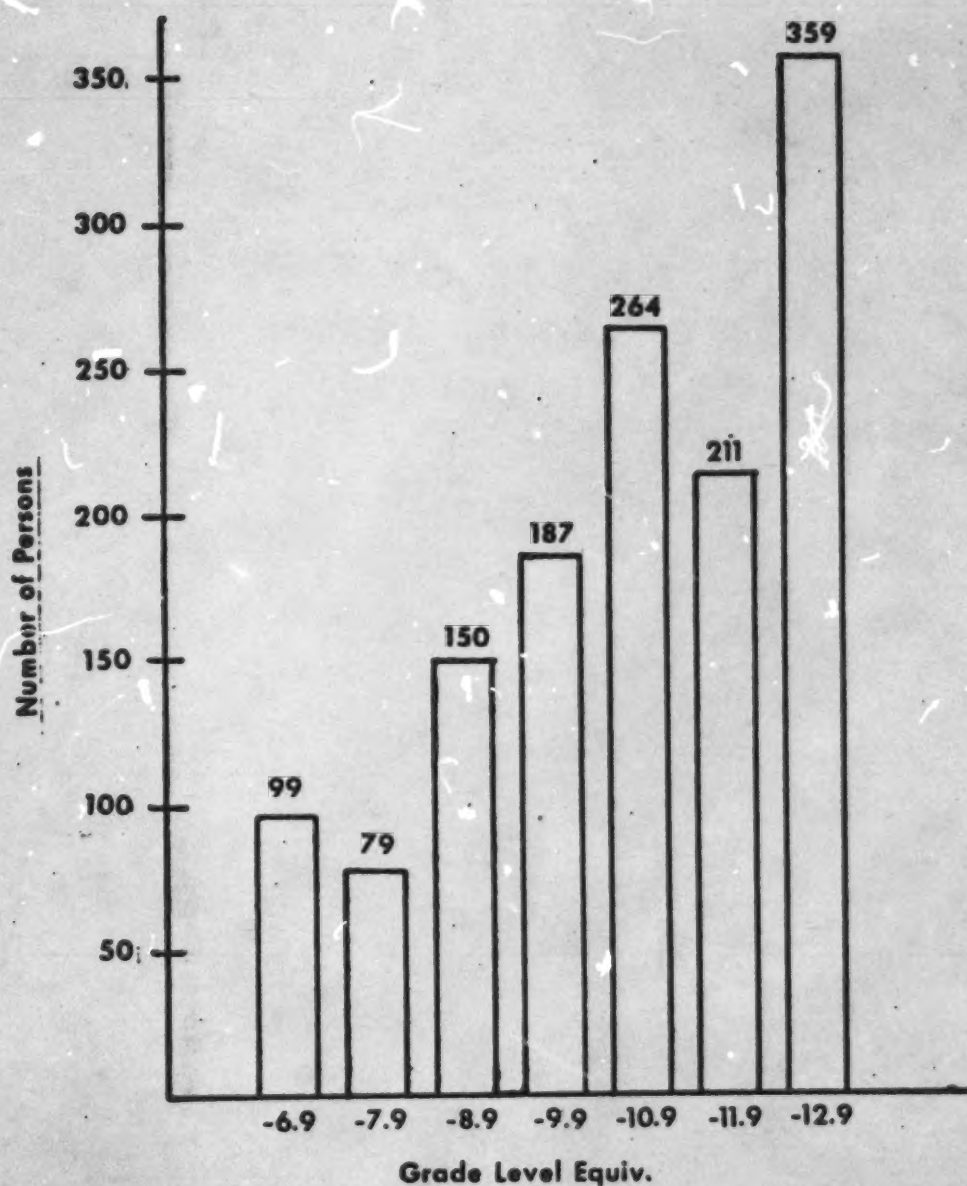
Distribution of Vocabulary Scores below 13th grade*

for Jr. College freshmen in the Nelson-Denney Reading Test form C

***Represents 42.2% of population of study**



Distribution of Reading Comprehension Scores below 13.0*
for Jr. College Freshmen on the Nelson-Denney Reading Test form C
*Represents 57.5% of population of study



Distribution of Scores (Total Reading) below 13.0*
for Jr. College Freshmen on Nelson -Denney Reading Test Form C
*Represents 50.4% of population of study

comprehension score (.004).

A significant difference was also found in comparing the 11 % of the population identified by Spanish surname to the other students in the population. Here, too, significant differences were found for total, vocabulary, and comprehension scores, all .001, demonstrating that this minority group had greater need for skill development in reading.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that there is a substantial need for courses and tutorial assistance for students at this junior college. If the 1,044 students whose comprehension scores were tenth grade level or lower (phase 1 of this study) were placed in classes of 25 there would need to be at least 48 sections of reading classes.

The make-up of these classes should, according to the findings, include more males than females. Also a substantial percentage of the Spanish surname population should be identified and counseled into appropriate reading courses.

Results also indicate that strong emphasis, at this time, needs to be placed on reading comprehension. Correlations between vocabulary and comprehension reported in the literature were .80 and .82 (Goolsby 1973, 1976); however, in this study correlation was found to be .615. This is a substantial difference.

The percentage of students demonstrating lack of adequate reading skills appears to be increasing (tables 1 and 2.) This finding is in

agreement with those of Truinman, Rowls and Gaar (1976) and Harneschfeger and Wiley (1976). One might question whether the decline of scores in reading and other tests is a reflection of the comprehension scores being substantially lower than vocabulary, as seen in this study. On the other hand it may be the passiveness of adequate skill instruction at earlier levels.

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